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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000225

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SUBJECT: CZECHS WILL SEEK U.S. HELP TO CREATE PRT IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: PRAGUE 96

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons  
1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Czech MFA hopes to have joint agreement with a reluctant MOD by the end of May to field a Czech-led PRT mission in Afghanistan. Approval for the mission would fall to a post-June-election government, but keeping to the May target would protect the mission from political tampering and make eventual authorization more likely. The MFA's Political Director plans to seek U.S. assistance in facilitating a Czech PRT during his March 20-24 meetings in Washington. End summary.

¶2. (C) PolOff and DATT met with Vaclav Balek, Deputy Director of the MFA's Security Policy Department Feb 28 to request an update about Czech hopes to field a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan in 2007. Poloff and DATT had a similar discussion March 1st with Radomir Jahoda, Director of the MOD's Defense Policy Department. The Czechs currently contribute 44 troops to the German-led PRT, stationed at Badakshan.

¶3. (C) In the meeting at the MFA, Balek shared that a recent planning session between the MFA and MOD had been contentious, with the MOD focused on logistical, manpower, and financial concerns. Balek shared that this dynamic had played out before, when the GOCR was considering the fielding of an EU battlegroup. In that case the MOD eventually abandoned its opposition and became an enthusiastic supporter of that mission. Balek said the MFA and MOD are now working together to identify available Czech units, and compiling a list of the areas where the Czechs would need international support in order to field a PRT. As a part of that process the MFA believes between 100 and 150 troops will be made available for the mission. Deployment would be in Spring ¶2007.

¶4. (C) MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil plans to raise the Czechs' PRT ambitions during his visit to Washington March 20-24. Balek said Povejsil will request U.S. assistance to provide the necessary capabilities, or to assist the Czechs in finding NATO partners with the necessary skills to support or join a Czech PRT. Balek said the MFA Security Policy Department will share the substance of Povejsil's PRT briefing papers for his Washington trip as soon as they

become available. This includes the list of identified capability shortfalls. The Czechs hope this will facilitate more effective and practical discussions about a Czech PRT during Povejsil's Washington meetings. Foreign Minister Svoboda is a champion of the plan for a Czech PRT within the domestic political arena. He intends to raise the issue at a requested meeting with Secretary Rice in April, a move which could provide important political momentum for the project in Prague.

¶5. (C) The MFA believes that, if it can identify partners to meet the shortfalls, the planning process might be complete and "packaged" by the end of May. By then the Czech political leadership's focus on the June elections will mean the matter will have to fall to the next Government. Balek felt the elections, while not completely predictable, did not present a major political threat to the mission. He outlined plans to minimize the domestic political impact of a new Czech PRT by rolling this prepackaged concept into the regular annual foreign deployments authorization process. This usually goes before the cabinet in the summer, and before Parliament in September.

¶6. (C) The Ministry of Defense remains much less optimistic. Jahoda confirmed the MFA and MOD are working together to identify shortfalls, but believes it is more likely than not that the GOCR will conclude it does have the ability to lead a PRT at this time. Jahoda also mentioned that a Czech withdrawal from their involvement in the German PRT in Afghanistan would lose them four billets at the command center in Potsdam, where the Czechs would like to base their operational headquarters for a Czech-led EU Battlegroup in ¶2009. DATT advised Jahoda that the MOD should not rush to a

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negative judgment on the issue of a PRT, and should explore all options for collaboration with allies before making a recommendation.

¶7. (C) Comment: This Czech PRT initiative began in the MFA, where it was thought that the Czech Republic had too low a profile in Afghanistan, and was not receiving due recognition for personnel already deployed. The MFA appears confident that, at the political level, it can force the MOD to agree to undertake the mission before the elections, thus making the idea more resistant to political tampering by a new government. Foreign Minister Svoboda will be crucial in this process. Post will continue to work with the GOCR to encourage and facilitate the creation of a Czech PRT, and will engage with Minister of Defense Kuehnl and his staff to encourage such a deployment. End Comment.  
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